

Question 26:

If buddhism is the middle path why do theravada monks abstain from music and tell that if you want enlightenment you should become a monk?

There is a song by Beatles called "all you need is love. Music can spread so much love so why when do you go to the extreme of abstaining from music? In hinduism there have been many gurus who lived family life and attained enlightenment so how can buddhism be the middle path?

*From Henrik Hagnell*

Answer:

To become enlightened, it is not necessary to become a monk. The Buddha's father, who was a king living a normal family life, became an *anagami*, that is, he attained the third level on the path to full enlightenment, meaning that he would never take rebirth in a human or lower world, but upon death would be born in a heavenly world from which he would attain Nirvana.

The purpose of the disciplinary rule (vinaya) for monks to refrain from listening to music is for them to avoid sensory experiences which arouse worldly attachment, which is a distraction from their spiritual path. Especially in earlier times or in forest hermitages, monks had an extremely simple life in the quiet, peaceful natural environment and monasteries, which brings deep tranquility to the mind. Relative to that tranquility, music would not make their minds more calm, but would excite their minds. However, in our modern world, with the complexity of life and high levels of sensory stimulation and agitation, music can soothe the mind and encourage positive, happy thoughts. Some music can promote devotional or spiritual thoughts. Devotional music is not only prominent in Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and other faiths, but also (referenced as "Bhakti Geet") in the Theravada Buddhist lay community, which often performs such devotional songs in the presence of monks. Since such music encourages wholesome thoughts, it would not appear to be a violation of the rule. Devotional music can generate a high vibration similar to that generated from Buddhist chanting.

The "middle path" of Buddhism, or the 8-Fold Path, is a method of practice that leads safely and surely to enlightenment, which avoids the extremes of self-indulgence and self-torment. A monk's life is not supposed to be a torment, but rather a choice of a peaceful disciplined life of equanimity rather than an exciting, agitating busy lay life of extreme emotional ups and downs.